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# Capabilities to lead and manage hybrid teams

Learn 7 key leadership capabilities that can enable you to meaningfully support hybrid work.

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In 2022, the NSW Public Service Commission sponsored a work-based research project exploring the leadership capabilities needed to support hybrid work in the NSW Government.

The research identified 7 specific leadership capabilities and behaviours required to support hybrid work.

1. Trust building
2. Managing flexibility
3. Managing the pressures that come from hybrid work
4. Digital capabilities
5. Building culture
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7. Empowering autonomy



**Leadership is 'an individual's ability to motivate, guide and influence a group of people towards the achievement of a common goal or strategy.'**

-NSW Public Sector Talent Review Framework

## Trust building

With the rise of dispersed teams and reduced in-person visibility, leaders must adjust their thinking around productivity and employee engagement. Trust is key in empowering teams and being confident they will deliver outcomes despite working from dispersed locations.

### Encourage and practice autonomy ▼

Enable teams to work independently, deliver their outputs based on clear goals and objectives without being micro-managed.

### Walk the talk ▼

Your leadership behaviours need to match the values and expectations of the organisation to ensure staff do not see a disconnect from what they are being told.

### Be intentional and deliberate with your communication and actions ▼

Develop a clear strategy on how to engage teams and to ensure information flow is two-way, rather than passive one-way models.

### Be as open and as transparent as possible ▼

Being as open and transparent about issues and decisions will enable greater trust between leaders and teams.

## Manage flexibility

When managing flexibility, leaders need to strike a balance between individual, team, and organisational needs. Communication is essential in understanding changing circumstances and priorities and shifting away from a 'one size fits all' approach.

### Hybrid 'walking the floor' ▼

Regularly and deliberately check in with your team. Communicating, and not just for task completion, is vital for employees to feel valued and productive.

### Communicate, communicate, communicate, and then communicate some more ▼

Do not underestimate the need to be in contact with team members, whether it is by email, a virtual meeting, in-person, phone, text or Microsoft Teams channel.

You will never over-communicate with staff – they want and need to hear from you in a hybrid environment. This can provide clarity on tasks, expectations, and culture.

Remember, everyone is different, and will need a different method of communication so you may need to say the same thing in person as you put in an email and then have a one-on-one conversation all about the same topic.

### Prioritise ▼

Help your team, and yourself, by constantly reprioritising the priorities. This will help your team know what is wanted and what the expectations are by you, each other and the executive leadership.

### Mentoring and shadowing ▼

Set up shadowing opportunities for you and your staff. There is value in spending the day undertaking professional development with other members of the broader team.

It will help you to understand the role of you and your team in a broader organisational context as well as provide visibility to team members and build commitment to organisational goals and objectives.

### Anchor days ▼

Where it is relevant to your working environment, create ‘anchor days’ where all staff attend the office at least one day a week, fortnight, or month. It will help build or sustain team trust and culture and enable creative discussions. These days should have clear agendas with a focus on person-to-person collaboration. This can involve work tasks or interpersonal culture building activities.

## Managing the pressures that come from hybrid work

The blurred lines between home and work life, present challenges such as the pressure felt to ‘always be on’. Understanding and balancing individual and organisational needs is essential in managing burnout and productivity.

### Focus on outcomes

Ensure managers and leaders are focusing on outcomes. This renewed focus will allow leaders to focus on the key aspects of their teams and not feel as compelled to ‘monitor’ staff.

### Focus on people

Schedule time to engage with individual employees and teams and understand each individual’s working style, pressures and motivations.

## Digital capabilities

Technology is crucial in how we connect and complete work. Leaders need to prioritise digital literacy to communicate and support their hybrid teams.

### Improve your digital literacy

Be open to learning new digital tools that can help you share and collaborate regardless of time, place and setting. Contemporary time management applications can reduce workloads for you and your team and assist with team coordination.

### Don’t set and forget

Regularly source 'stretch' digital training opportunities for yourself and your team.

### **Skin in the game**



Regularly talk with your IT colleagues. Let them know if you have the flexibility, connectivity and scalability that you need to support your team to work and connect in a hybrid setting.

## **Building culture**

Culture is often described as how organisations 'do things'. It can be conveyed through non-verbal presence, cues and behaviours that are not easily visible in a hybrid environment. Leaders that are deliberate about culture can enable expectation setting, creating a shared purpose and managing employee engagement and wellbeing.

### **Recognition**



Both the research agree that showing appreciation for employees, or teams, and the efforts that they have put in are valuable to building and demonstrating the organisational culture.

### **Authenticity**



The pandemic has resulted in employees being a part of each other's lives like never before. Therefore, there is a need to respond to this and as a leader balance being your authentic, true self at work but also leading and managing people.

There is a mismatch between employee perceptions of leaders displaying the organisational culture and leaders believing they are, "closing these gaps in perception and authenticity is essential, because authenticity is correlated with not just good feelings but also measurable business outcomes" (PWC 2021).

These statements all point to the need for leaders to be human and authentic in their transactions with their team members. In turn, this will build rapport, trust, employee wellbeing and influence the culture of the organisation.

### **Role modelling**



It is not a new concept that leaders need to role model the values and behaviours that they expect of staff. However, in a hybrid work environment it is more critical to be deliberate and to think through how leaders can display and showcase those non-verbal expectations that they have of employees.

### **Create the ‘water cooler’ moments**



In-person communication styles from the office will never be replaced in totality in a hybrid work environment. However, leaders can create those ‘water cooler’ moments to replace those traditional methods of communication in a virtual setting.

There are multiple ways in which this can be done including utilising all technological channels that are open – virtual whiteboards to generate ideas, having check-ins or team sessions that are focused on idea generation and not the ‘work or task of the day’ or using Teams channels.

Also, when in the office, utilise that time to connect and create the physical ‘water cooler’ moments by having unscheduled time and conversations with staff.

### **Selling the office**



After living through a pandemic and having to work remotely for a lot of that time, many employees are hesitant to return to the office. It is therefore critical that leaders deliberately ‘sell the office’ to staff but then subsequently make time in the office add some value to their ‘working from home offer’.

Staff need to know that they aren’t going to sit in virtual meetings all day (from the office) and need to get that face-to-face interaction and social aspect of working in a physical space together.

Leaders need to be deliberate in organising ‘face time’ between staff and other levels of leadership, having collaboration sessions in person and making use of the time physically together to have those aforementioned “water cooler moments”.

## **Leading new teams and new starters**

The onboarding experience is different in the virtual or hybrid world. New starters may feel isolated, particularly if they do not feel comfortable reaching out to others who are not physically near them.

There is a need to be deliberate as there may be a reduction in organic knowledge sharing, a lack of clarity of priorities and balancing the needs of the individual, team, and organisation.

### **Set up technology early**



Ensure new starters have access to a computer and have their login information prior to commencement. This might mean meeting the new starter at the office to hand over equipment or couriering it to their hybrid work location.

## Introductions

Go beyond sending a welcome email for new starters. Set up introductory meetings for key colleagues they will be working with, including executive leaders, either in-person or virtually, so they can understand their role in the broader team but also get a sense of the culture.

## Induct and check in

Be deliberate as a leader in the induction of your new starter by tailoring the information provided to them. Check in frequently to assist them in understanding the priorities and try to meet with them in-person as early as possible to develop rapport.

## Have a hybrid buddy

Assign a peer support buddy to the new starter so they have someone else they can lean on to answer the 'silly questions' but to also learn about the organisation and its culture. This will also assist in developing meaningful relationships with staff and overcome proximity bias.

## Frequent check-ins with staff, independently and collectively

Leaders must be deliberate in planning interactions with staff and schedule these as frequently as necessary. If possible, do this in-person to build relationships both between yourself and the team members, and for the team members together. Not every catch-up needs to be about work. Schedule time to solely talk to employees on a personal level to build better relationships.

# Empowering autonomy

It is important to reflect on traditional leadership styles and to what degree they apply in a hybrid environment.

## Avoid proximity bias

Do not show preference for those who are near you physically. Be inclusive and supportive of regional and rural employees, part time employees and those who work hybrid. Become comfortable with delegating from a distance.

### Micro learnings



Have regular leadership micro-learnings to continually improve your leadership capability (hybrid or otherwise).

### Avoid micromanaging



Leaders need to focus on outcomes and outputs in addition to the processes.

The information on this page is extracted from **Leadership capabilities needed to support hybrid work in NSW government, Dove J, Stewart M, Solomon G, Wood C & Ziersch J, 2022.**